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General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

14th plenary meeting
Saturday, 25 September 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 125 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/54/333/Add.3)

The President: In a letter contained in document A/54/333/Add.3, the Secretary-General informs me that, since the issuance of his communications contained in document A/54/333 and addenda 1 and 2, Guinea has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: The General Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau.

Mr. Tommy Remengesau, Jr., Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, His Excellency Mr. Tommy Remengesau, Jr., and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Remengesau (Palau): Let me first congratulate you, Sir, on your unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We likewise extend our appreciation to Mr. Didier Opertti, the President of the Assembly at its fifty-third session. We wish also to convey our appreciation and thanks to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan for his leadership in promoting the objectives and the mission of the United Nations.

I wish to convey the warm greetings of President Kuniwo Nakamura, the entire leadership and the people of the Republic of Palau to the Assembly on the occasion of the fifty-fourth session. On behalf of the Government and the people of Palau, I extend our sincere appreciation to the members of this body for their assistance.

Since attaining membership of the United Nations in 1994, the Republic of Palau has benefitted greatly from a variety of United Nations-sponsored programmes and from international cooperation, which have helped us play our role in promoting peace and democracy in our region. This year, on 1 October, we proudly celebrate the fifth anniversary of our independence, which came about as a result of a unique and very successful political treaty with the United States of America under the Compact of Free Association. Diplomatic relations and economic cooperation with a growing number of members of this body assure stability and promise great economic potential for the future.

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Before I proceed, let me take this rare opportunity to welcome three of our regional neighbours — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga — and to congratulate them on joining this important Organization.

Palau also expresses its appreciation and support for the efforts of the Security Council in promoting peace, security and the protection of human rights and democracy throughout the world, and especially in troubled areas in need of United Nations intervention.

Today we have less than 100 days left before entering the new millennium — 97 days to be exact. There are indeed many global issues and problems that certainly deserve our attention. The existence of the Earth in the next millennium may, however, be in great jeopardy if the environment and nature's forces can no longer support the human population. Global warming or climate change may merit the upmost attention and our concerted effort. I call upon every Member State, large and small, developed and developing, rich and poor, to work cooperatively to find meaningful solutions and preventive actions for this growing international problem and challenge. I am confident that through sharing information on climate change we can learn from one another and take the necessary steps to meet this very dangerous global problem.

Let me share a Palauan proverb with the Assembly, one that foreshadows climate change. In Palau the winds are mainly from the east or from the west. When there are easterly winds, the sky is not so telling before the rain. As the rain commences, one may think it is just a light shower. However, it actually comes in a downpour. In the old days our raincoat was simply several leaves sewn together and put over our heads. So we would get soaked through and through during this downpour. The message is: do not underestimate the easterly winds, or you will get deluged with water.

That is our message from yesterday, and it is our message today: do not take climate change lightly, or there will be dire consequences. Climate change for small island nations such as the Republic of Palau has great consequences because of our fragile ecosystem. To expand on just a few examples, the El Niño phenomenon, which impacted many communities throughout the globe, had far-reaching and devastating effects in Palau as well. At least one third of all our hard coral communities died. Our reefs are home to over 500 species of corals and 1,500 species of fish, and are vibrant with marine life. The loss of our coral communities effects our entire ecosystem and eventually our people and their economic livelihoods. The El Niño phenomenon also caused extreme drought that dried up our main water reservoir and destroyed over 1,400 patches of our most important root crop, taro, which of course added another burden to our daily lives.

Palau and our Pacific region are also suffering from unusually high rises in tide tables, causing our farmlands to be infiltrated with salt water that eventually will have dire effects on our crops. This high sea level rise has literally caused islands to disappear, and others are in imminent danger of disappearing. Abnormally warm ocean temperatures have also caused extensive coral bleaching, and rising atmospheric temperatures devastate agriculture. According to the 1999-2000 *World Development Report*, a 1 metre sea level rise due to climate change would force about 70 million people to move, and would have a dramatic effect on food security in central Asia and the Pacific. Many other examples exist, I am sure.

These few examples, and examples in other countries, beg for global cooperation on climate change. The Republic of Palau recognizes the link between climate change and biodiversity, and is committed to preserving our biodiversity. Protecting our forests is one of the most effective mechanisms to slow climate change. Forests, as we know, are carbon sinks, which absorb carbon dioxide rather than releasing it as a harmful greenhouse gas. Because of this, the destruction of forest has a dramatic impact on climate change. The Republic of Palau has taken responsibility for its forests through the National Forest Act and Mangrove Management Plan. Progress is being made on national regulations requiring protective vegetative zones along our wetland and coastal areas. The Republic of Palau sponsors a summer tree planting programme for our children in order to teach our youth the importance of our natural resources. We are taking steps necessary to ensure that our forests and reefs are available for future generations.

The Republic of Palau has incorporated the grave issues of climate change and rises in sea level into long-term strategic planning. Instruments for accession to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol are in transmission, and we humbly request international assistance to develop a comprehensive vulnerability index that encompasses economic and environmental factors like climate change.

We enthusiastically support efforts to adjust energy prices to accurately reflect the environmental consequences of fossil fuel use. Alongside climate change, energy conservation is critical to Palau's economy and the environment. We have established a national policy, the National Energy Goal, to subsidize renewable energy programmes, and have audited all Government facilities for energy efficiency. At our national hospital we replaced standard incandescent lights with energy efficient compact fluorescent lamps. Solar panels provide lights for our outer islands and isolated villages. Solar beacons light our reef channels. Our national energy programme and public utility corporation are in partnership with the Million Solar Rooftops initiative to educate the public about renewable energy applications. Let us start off the new century with a dynamic move away from fossil fuels and towards a commitment to environment friendly energy alternatives.

Entering into relevant agreements and conventions which target international response to environmental issues is another responsibility that our Republic has to its people and this world community. It is one that we are fulfilling as time goes on, being a signatory and party to eight international agreements, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Republic of Palau views climate change as being in the forefront of issues that need to be addressed, and that can only be effectively addressed if all Member States meaningfully contribute on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities. The use of the Kyoto mechanisms is an integral component of a global solution to the issue of climate change. Therefore, it is critical that no artificial restrictions be placed on the use of these mechanisms. If we can all come to terms with the intent of the Kyoto mechanisms and develop a fair and realistic approach to their use, there will be no sufficient reason why we cannot enter the new millennium with positive remedies to the issue of climate change. Maybe we can even enter the new millennium with a breath of fresh air.

As we travel towards the new millennium, let us move forward with the tools that we have developed as an international family, so that the benefits, although they may go unseen in our generation, may be fully appreciated by our children and their children. These initiatives shall be our imprint, our assurance of a healthier environment for generations to come.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tommy Remengesau, Jr., Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, was escorted from the rostrum.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General Debate

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, His Excellency Mr. Ural Latypov.

Mr. Latypov (Belarus): Please, Sir, accept my most sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session, as well as my wishes for every success in the discharge of this complex and responsible mission. We are thankful for the work of your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti. We also greatly appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to effectively and energetically lead our Organization.

Belarus welcomes the enlargement of the United Nations family of nations, which recently accepted three new members: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is being held at the doorway between centuries and millennia. This fact alone urges us to take an in-depth look at both the past and the present of the United Nations and to think about its future. The expanding global challenges, especially ethnic conflicts, deterioration of the environment, transnational crime and terrorism can be met only by concerted efforts of the United Nations.

Belarus will be actively contributing to the formation of a new image of the United Nations as an organization capable of tackling the challenges of the day. Our country was among the Organization's founding members, who bestowed upon the United Nations such high and noble goals and principles. We are interested in their consolidation and development.

This year the Organization experienced what was probably one of the most serious tests in its entire history. The United Nations was virtually marginalized during the crisis around Yugoslavia. The decision to use military force against a sovereign State was taken without the authorization of the Security Council.

Although the settlement of the Kosovo crisis has now been brought back under the auspices of the United Nations, a recurrence of attempts to randomly use force outside the Security Council mechanism cannot be excluded. Consequently, the question as to whether the Security Council should remain the only — I reiterate, the only — international institution to authorize the use of force for the maintenance of international peace and security as yet remains unanswered.

The answer that is today given to this question will determine developments in the twenty-first century. Will it be the age of fairness and the rule of law, or will the world be thrown back into the era when force was the only argument? From a historical perspective, such a development would return us to the beginning of this century. Let us recall that the dawn of the twentieth century saw nations divided into two categories: subjects and objects of international law, with their fate totally dependent upon their ability to defend themselves by military force.

I believe that a totally different world order would most adequately meet the interests of all members of the international community. This is a world order in which all countries are equal and are protected by international law and the United Nations. The prerogative of the Security Council to establish and maintain peace and security is a key element of this system.

Naturally this places a special burden of responsibility on the Security Council and its members. We view the increase in both permanent and non-permanent members of the Council on the basis of equitable geographical distribution to be an important measure that would improve the Council's effectiveness.

Guided by the intention to contribute further to strengthening peace and security, Belarus has presented its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2002-2003. The elections will be held in 2001, during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

As regards the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace and security, I would also like to underline the need to make fuller use of the entire set of measures envisaged in the Charter. Special emphasis should be put on the prevention of conflicts by peaceful means, which, if applied in a consistent and efficient manner, would produce substantial results. This can be explicitly illustrated by recent positive developments in the Middle East peace process, which Belarus welcomes and supports. I avail myself of this opportunity to reaffirm the readiness of the Government of the Republic of Belarus to contribute actively to the resolution of conflicts in post-Soviet countries and, in particular, to host in our capital, Minsk, the international conference on Nagorny Karabakh.

More than half a century ago, sovereign States, including Belarus, founded the United Nations to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person". To uphold its legal and moral commitments the international community cannot and must not remain inactive in the face of gross and systematic violations of human rights. Genocide in Rwanda, events in East Timor — these and similar occurrences must lead to immediate and decisive action on the part of the United Nations. But such action must be taken in full compliance with the decisions of the Security Council.

At the same time it is obvious that the sacred principle of the protection of human rights, once interpreted selectively, becomes meaningless. Unfortunately, double standards in the interpretation of the notion of human rights are still applied all too often in international politics. It would be dangerously misleading to assume that human rights can be protected by means that ignore the principle of the sovereign equality of States. Disregarding State interests in the pursuit of individual values can cause unpredictable consequences.

Globalization is creating a situation in which the prosperity and even more the underdevelopment of certain regions, or conflicts in them, directly affect the global state of affairs. From this perspective, the developments of the twenty-first century will be largely influenced by processes taking shape in the enormous Eurasian region, of which my country is an integral part.

Multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Belarus has, thank God, avoided the religious and ethnic conflicts that have been so characteristic of many post-Soviet countries. Duly organized governmental management and law enforcement systems have allowed us to ensure an adequate level of security for our society and people. Situated on the crossroads between the east and the west, the north and the south of the continent, Belarus will be further contributing to international cooperation in combating transborder crime, terrorism and illicit drug trafficking.

A few days ago Belarus became party to the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings. We also support the idea of holding a United Nations conference or a special session of the General Assembly on the suppression of terrorism.

Belarus is ready to cooperate most actively with all members of the international community to address these and other global and regional challenges. Openness to mutually beneficial cooperation is probably one of the main features of Belarus' foreign policy, which sincerely seeks to establish a network of good neighbourly relations embracing our country.

Although consistent in its principled position on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Belarus demonstrates good will and acts constructively to prevent the re-emergence of new dividing lines in Europe. In this context, we support the idea of adopting, at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Istanbul, the charter for European security, which is to become a code of behaviour for all of Europe.

Historically and geographically belonging to European civilization, Belarus is seeking to become a full fledged member of integration processes on the continent. The rapprochement between Belarus and Russia is in line with processes of global development. The consolidation of efforts by Belarus and Russia, enjoying wide public support in both countries, allows us to more effectively solve problems faced by the two States and two peoples.

Belarus has become a full fledged member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). We share the values and philosophy of the Movement and the provisions of the NAM Plan of Action that are consonant with the United Nations principles and objectives, as well as with the global challenges of establishing a multipolar world order.

Regrettably, the world is entering the new century with the burden of arms so powerful they can extinguish all life on the planet. For this reason, disarmament, especially in the nuclear sphere, remains among the main priorities of the United Nations. A few years ago, Belarus made an historic choice by relinquishing the possession of nuclear arms inherited from the former Soviet Union. Now, we urge all countries which have not yet become parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to join those that have made the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world their utmost priority. We also stand for an early agreement on the prohibition of the production of fissile materials.

In conditions in which the nuclear Powers are still not ready fully to relinquish the possession of such arms, there is a pressing need to withdraw them from as much of the world as possible, especially from heavily populated regions. Proceeding from this, we once again call on countries of our region to review their attitudes towards the initiative put forward by President Lukashenka of Belarus on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free space in Central and Eastern Europe, as reflected in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. The assumption by countries of our region of binding legal commitments not to deploy nuclear weapons on their territory would be of paramount importance to the security of the European family of nations. I believe that, sooner or later, all our neighbours will arrive at this obvious conclusion. Since time is of the essence, we propose to begin consultations immediately with all interested parties to exchange ideas and bridge positions on this problem.

Other types of weapons of mass destruction are by no means less dangerous. We welcome the appeal voiced from this high rostrum to protect our children from the scourge of nuclear, chemical and biological warfare. We believe that the international community would be taking the right step if it were to establish a preventive mechanism to take timely and coordinated measures to control the development and production of new types of weapons of mass destruction.

Proceeding from this, the Belarus delegation at this session will initiate a draft resolution on the prohibition of the development and manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons. Likewise, we support the proposal to adopt a resolution on the consolidation of and respect for the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

As was rightly observed in this Hall, the strength and effectiveness of the United Nations depend on the sustainable development of its Member States. Having achieved independence, Belarus has chosen its own model of economic development which adequately reflects its national conditions and capacity. This is a model socially oriented market economy. Our objective is not simply the implementation of reforms for their own sake, but the achievement of a more effective economy. In recent years, we have been maintaining a positive dynamic of gross domestic product growth that, in 1998, was up by

8 per cent. Belarus is a self-reliant country. Our outstanding debt is only $133 per capita.

An open economy, Belarus exports more than half of its gross domestic product and is taking energetic measures to find an appropriate place in the international division of labour. Our country has all the necessary prerequisites for that, including extensive technical and scientific potential and human resources. Economic performance is essential for safeguarding social stability. The development of democratic institutions is an integral part of sustainable development. Mindful of that, the Government of Belarus has initiated a broad dialogue between all political forces in the country in an effort to jointly analyze avenues for the further political development of Belarus at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The parliamentary elections in 2000 and the presidential elections in 2001 should play an important role in this process. The Government of Belarus will make every effort to conduct these elections democratically and freely.

Among the important global challenges facing the United Nations is the protection of the environment and the alleviation of the negative consequences of natural disasters and technological catastrophes. For more than 13 years now, this has been a matter of survival for the Belarusian nation. The elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster accounts for almost 20 per cent of our annual budget spending. I take this opportunity to express most sincere gratitude to all the States and international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations which throughout these years have never been dispassionate about the tragedy of the Belarusian people. Positively assessing the efforts of the United Nations, Belarus today calls upon the international community to continue cooperation and strengthen the United Nations role in this direction. Together with the Russian Federation and Ukraine, Belarus will present a draft resolution on this issue at the current session. We are hopeful that the United Nations Member States will render their valuable support.

The current session of the General Assembly is an important stage in preparing for the Millennium Assembly that should take practical decisions worthy of this forum. The Republic of Belarus has proposed as a subject for discussion at the 2000 Assembly the issue of the United Nations role in the furtherance of peace and human sustainable development in conditions of globalization. Aware of the historic importance of this event, Belarus will actively contribute to the success of the Millennium Assembly and Summit and reaffirms its commitment to the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr. Paek Nam Sun.

Mr. Paek Nam Sun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): At the outset, please allow me to express, on behalf of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, our pleasure on congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We believe that your diplomatic skill and rich experience will greatly contribute to our work at this session.

I avail myself of this opportunity to extend my gratitude to Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uruguay, for his tangible contribution to United Nations activities during his tenure of his office as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I also express appreciation for the efforts of the Secretary-General towards strengthening the functions and the role of the United Nations.

The current session, which is being held at the historic turn of the century, has an important mission to give new hope to humankind. The challenges and the difficulties facing international society are growing ever more complex and intricate. The cold war has ended but domination and hegemony continue to exist. High-handedness and arbitrariness continue to pose major threats to international peace and security. Because of the high-handedness and arbitrariness, so prevalent in international relations, the principles of justice and fairness are often disregarded and the principle of sovereign equality — a lifeline to United Nations activities — is shaken to its very foundation.

Moreover, we have recently seen grave situations whereby the internal affairs of sovereign States are interfered in by force. Today international society must choose one of the two following options: whether the twenty-first century will be a century of independence, equality and peace, or whether it will be a century of high-handedness and arbitrariness. If we choose the latter, all countries with weak national defence capabilities will be vulnerable to bombing, as was the case in Yugoslavia.

As we are all well aware, the Korean peninsula stands at the centre of international peace and security. Therefore, as a party directly concerned, I wish to take this opportunity to present the details of views and

positions regarding the present situation there. This will, we believe, be a most effective contribution to the work of the current session.

At present, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is being blatantly portrayed as a dangerous area of nuclear weapons proliferation and a source of missile threats. For example, an empty tunnel is suspected of being an underground nuclear facility and a satellite is labelled a ballistic missile. These are now being used as pretexts for reviving a "star wars" plan, a phantom of the cold war, in a variant named "the missile defence system". Meanwhile, the attempts of a defeated State to rearm and to re-emerge as a military power are being accelerated at the fastest possible speed and even a debate calling for nuclear armaments has come to the fore.

Pursuant to operation plan 502798, aimed at preemptive attacks against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, large-scale strike forces have been surreptitiously amassed in and around South Korea. They are entering into actual combat readiness through various joint military exercises. It is becoming almost a reality, not simply an assumption, that the Korean peninsula will become a second Balkans. In the Balkan region, a humanitarian crisis served as a pretext for war, whereas on the Korean peninsula, the so-called missile issue is likely to be used instead.

Our satellite launch is an exercise of equal rights in the use of outer space that is recognized by the United Nations. Strengthening our national defence capabilities is an exercise of our sovereign right of legitimate defence: it does not constitute a violation of any obligations the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has under existing international treaties. Nevertheless, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has become a target of United States high-handedness and arbitrariness. The reason is very clear: placing the entire Korean peninsula under its control is a top priority of the Asia strategy of the United States. As Yugoslavia becomes an impediment to United States domination over the Balkan area, so the adherence of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to socialism is considered an obstacle to its Asia strategy.

Much the same can be said about why Japan is so hysterically resorting to a campaign against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Japan has not liquidated its past crimes against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, alone amongst countries. Japan is miscalculating that, if the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were stifled, the issue of liquidating its past crimes would fade away by itself. Not only that, Japan is fabricating threats, one after the other, as an excuse to become a military Power.

Our people love peace and aspire to it even more than others: they lived for the first half of this century under the colonial rule of Japan and they have been living for the second in a state of belligerence with the United States. Nevertheless, we do not beg for peace: we want a peace in which we can enjoy an independent life, not the peace of slaves denied all freedom.

Sovereignty is the lifeline of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and socialism is the life of our people. It is the unshakeable will of our people, and State policy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to defend, consolidate and develop to the utmost our own style of socialism, chosen by the people themselves. This is an exercise of the right to self-determination and freedom of choice recognized by the United Nations. The present-day confrontation on the Korean peninsula is in essence a confrontation between those who are masters of their own country trying to defend all that is theirs and the foreign forces attempting to harm them. This is the main factor underlying the continuing instability on the Korean peninsula.

Herein also lies the answer to the question of who is posing a threat to whom. It is not easy for our people, whose territory and population are small and who still lack almost everything, to defend their sovereignty single-handedly in the face of the collective, hostile power politics of the United States and its forces of subordination. We have no alternative but to strengthen our national defence capability ourselves, although this means we must tighten our belts. Because of our lack of capacity, Comrade Kim Jong Il, the great leader of our people, is employing an "army first" policy. This policy is our own unique way of uniting the whole people with the army into a bulwark, thus enabling us both to defend the country and develop its economy. Despite the persistent political, military and economic moves of hostile forces to suffocate us, up until now we have succeeded in defending our sovereignty and preventing another war on the Korean peninsula. This proves the strength of the "army first" policy, for defending socialism and ensuring peace with weapons.

The way to ensure lasting peace and security on the Korean peninsula is to end the hostile relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States and reunify Korea. The Democratic

People's Republic of Korea and the United States are still in a state of temporary armistice. Easing tension on the Korean peninsula and eliminating the danger of war will be possible when the United States discards, among other things, its hostile policy against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and concludes a peace agreement with it. There is no convincing reason why the United States must continue to antagonize the Democratic People's Republic of Korea alone in north-east Asia, almost 10 years after the end of the cold war. We do not want war, but we do strive to achieve the peaceful reunification of our country.

We have already made it clear that we would not regard the United States as a permanent enemy. We have also fully shown our good faith through our sincere implementation over the last five years of the Agreed Framework between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We have also made it clear that, while we will make continued efforts to catch up with neighbouring countries in the field of peaceful space activities, we are ready for discussions on the missile issue at any time, if hostile nations are sincere in their intentions to dispel our concern. Now it is the turn of the United States to prove its good faith to us with deeds, if it does not harbour ill intent towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is fortunate that the United States has recently decided on a partial lifting of economic sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but we look forward to a comprehensive and genuine lifting of them all.

If the United States stops pursuing its hostile policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and moves towards improved relations, we also will respond with good faith. For the present, we are to have high-level talks towards a settlement of outstanding issues between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States. These are to be held in response to the request from the United States, and missile launches will be suspended while the talks are under way.

The United States should not attempt to test the strength of our military capability or frighten and subdue our people with military threats and provocations. Reckless acts such as these will surely result in a strong self-defence response with possibly catastrophic consequences.

The United Nations should fulfil its responsibility for ensuring peace on the Korean peninsula by implementing, as early as possible, General Assembly resolution 3390 (XXX) B, calling for dissolution of the United Nations Command.

The early achievement of national reunification is the long-cherished desire of our nation. At the same time, it is a prerequisite for ensuring durable peace and security on the Korean peninsula. As long as Korea remains divided, the situation on the Korean peninsula and its surrounding areas will never be stable. This is detrimental to peace in Asia and also in the rest of the world.

We have already established national reunification principles. The three principles of independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity, which the North and South of Korea confirmed and made public at home and abroad, in the 4 July joint statement, constitute the grand reunification programme. They form the cornerstone of national reunification, which the United Nations officially welcomed in the resolution adopted at the twentieth session of the General Assembly.

The most above board and reasonable way to achieve reunification is the confederal formula, by which the North and South of Korea would be able to realize national reunification fairly and smoothly on the basis of preserving each other's ideas and systems as they are. Any attempts by one side to change the other, to make claims about the "sunshine policy" and engagement, while ignoring the reality that two different ideas and systems are existing in the North and South, will only mean confrontations and conflict.

In order to eliminate confrontations between the North and the South, and to promote national reconciliation and unity, the South Korean authorities should abolish, *inter alia*, the national security law, which has identified fellow countrymen as the enemy. The fact that delegates of patriotic organizations for reunification in South Korea who visited Pyongyang last August were imprisoned, because of their participation in the grand reunification festival, shows a clear picture of anti-reunification acts and human rights violations by South Korean authorities wielding the national security law. The South Korean authorities are now talking about reconciliation and cooperation with the North. But behind the scenes, they are criminalizing contacts and exchanges among the people and other personages of the North and South of Korea and are suppressing patriotic reunification forces by invoking the national security law.

Therefore, as long as the national security law and anti-national and anti-reunification law remains in place, it is impossible to achieve national reconciliation and unity and realize contacts and exchanges between the North and South of Korea. Only when the South Korean authorities take an attitude of national independence and patriotism, instead of depending upon foreign forces and collaborating with them, will North-South relations become characterized by trust and reconciliation and will a decisive breakthrough be opened for reunification.

On 18 April of last year, the respected General Kim Jong Il put forward the five point policy of great national unity to hasten the independent and peaceful reunification of the country. That policy is, first, to base oneself on the principle of national reunification; secondly, to unite the whole nation under the banners of patriotism and national reunification; thirdly, to improve North-South relations; fourthly, to struggle against alien domination and anti-reunification forces; and fifthly, to develop exchanges, contacts and dialogues and to strengthen solidarity and coalition throughout the entire nation.

Great unity of the whole nation would be national reunification. Even though there are still numerous difficulties and obstacles in the way of national reunification, we are optimistic about its prospects. Our nation is one, and so is our motherland. Under the banner of national reunification, our nation will achieve great national unity without fail.

The twenty-first century should be a century of independence, in which "dominationism" and high-handedness are eliminated and the sovereignty of all States is equally respected. In order to bring about a new century of independence and of durable peace, a just international order that never tolerates high-handedness and arbitrariness should be established.

To this end, the principle of respect for sovereignty should be strictly adhered to as the supreme principle in international relations. The assertion that disarmament, human rights and humanitarian issues should be placed above sovereignty should be firmly denounced as a dangerous attempt to justify both high-handedness and arbitrariness. Disputes cannot be properly settled by high-handed and arbitrary measures, such as sanctions and the use of force. They should be resolved through dialogue and negotiation on all accounts.

Countries of Africa and the Middle East that are insisting they should be responsible for resolving their issues through dialogue and negotiations are enjoying the support of the international community. What is important in establishing a just international order is to ensure fairness in the formulation and application of international treaties relating to disarmament, human rights and so forth. In particular, the double standard of abusing international law as a pretext for interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States and the use of force against sovereign States should be strictly rejected.

In order for the United Nations to fulfil its responsibilities and its role in accordance with the Charter, democracy should be practised in United Nations activities. Without enhancing the authority of the General Assembly, and without an early restructuring of the Security Council, the United Nations will be unable to meet the demands of a rapidly changing situation and to cope with new challenges. The authority of the General Assembly, where all Member States are represented and interact democratically on an equal footing, should be enhanced.

If the General Assembly is empowered to deliberate on crucial issues, such as ensuring international peace and security, and finally examines important Security Council resolutions concerning sanctions and the use of force, this will be conducive to ensuring fairness in United Nations activities and preventing arbitrariness by individual countries. The Security Council should be reformed in such a way as to have all regions equally represented in its composition and to ensure full transparency in all of its activities.

In this regard, we oppose under any circumstances the permanent membership of a defeated nation that has not liquidated its past crimes. We are of the view that the proposal put forward by member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement to first increase non-permanent seats, which is relatively easy to agree upon at this stage, deserves sincere consideration. Since the Security Council is taking its actions on behalf of the general United Nations membership, its working methods and, particularly, decision-making processes should be made more transparent for all of the Member States.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to maintain independence, peace and friendship as the fundamental ideals of its foreign policy.

We are convinced that attaching importance to independence, peace and friendship in international

relations conforms with the purposes and principles of the United Nations and makes a contribution to peace and security on the Korean peninsula, in Asia and in the rest of the world.

In conclusion, I assure the Assembly that the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will make sincere efforts for the success of the current session and will extend its active cooperation to the work of the presidency.

The President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand, His Excellency Mr. Surin Pitsuwan.

Mr. Pitsuwan (Thailand): On behalf of the Government and people of Thailand, I extend my warm congratulations to you, Sir, upon your unanimous election to the presidency of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I am confident that with your leadership and experience this session will complete its work successfully and set the stage for the Millennium Assembly and the millennium summit next year.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Didier Opertti, President of the Assembly at its fifty-third session. My delegation truly appreciates his leadership and his tireless dedication to the heavy responsibilities entrusted to him during the past year.

May I on behalf of the Government and people of Thailand congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission as new Members of the United Nations, which further reinforces the universal character of the Organization.

As we gather on the threshold of the new millennium, we find the United Nations and the international community are still preoccupied with maintaining international peace and security. Yet this is only one of the many purposes of our Organization; to achieving international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all is no less an important goal in our Charter.

Invariably, the traditional security paradigm predominates in the discussions and ensuing actions regarding international peace and security. A decade after the end of the cold war, global and regional organizations tend to focus their efforts primarily on traditional security concepts and related tools for solving security problems. In South-East Asia, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF), which deals with some aspects of security issues in this traditional sense.

But the traditional concepts of security are woefully inadequate to meet the new challenges faced by mankind. The very narrow scope of its definition serves as an intellectual strait-jacket which limits our ability to conceptualize and respond to new threats of our time.

This fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is being conducted under the menacing shadows of the conflicts in Kosovo and East Timor. All of us are preoccupied with the implications and consequences of the ways in which we choose to handle these conflicts.

More and more, we in the international community are being faced with conflicts within States, not between or among States, as in the past. Rather than State rights, State interests, State sovereignty, we now have to grapple with the defence of the common good, the protection of rights beyond borders and intervention to promote and safeguard humanitarian ideals and objectives.

Our Organization is now being challenged to provide clear guidelines for the collective pursuit of these new lofty goals and this complex agenda. Unless and until we, as the foremost Assembly of mankind, come up with criteria, objective and consensual, the international community will not be able to address the many lurking internal conflicts effectively. The period between now and the millennium summit next September is an opportune time for our collective deliberation on this issue. And I commend the Secretary-General for his leadership role in launching the process of consultation at the beginning of the session. My delegation pledges its full cooperation with him and with all representatives in the Assembly for the successful outcome of this historic search.

But let us not forget that before we can protect and promote those common interests, save rights beyond borders and think about intervention on the ground of humanitarian concerns, we have to make sure that we are in agreement about what it is that we must, that we want to, protect and promote.

I propose that we should begin to change our traditional, exclusive preoccupation with the security and sovereignty of States to serious consideration on the

emerging concept of human security. It is a concept which attempts to take us beyond the traditional meaning of security, by addressing new issues. The scope of what falls within the realm of human security is still not yet well defined, except to place people at the centre of our definition of security. Security is now people-related more than State-related.

One interpretation of human security in vogue includes upholding human dignity, protecting and promoting human rights and use of humanitarian law, shielding women, children and non-combatants from the effects of armed conflicts, and combating terrorism. We have also seen concerted action to meet these objectives through joint efforts to eradicate anti-personnel landmines, prevent the proliferation of small arms and struggle against organized crime. This somewhat limited interpretation of human security emphasizes physical protection of the human person, and strives to provide human beings with freedom from fear. This is a step in the right direction.

But it is not sufficient. We think human security should be more comprehensive. Can we afford to continue to attach less importance to addressing the social and economic dimensions of human security? Can we honestly enjoy genuine security amidst 1.3 billion people who live on less than $1 a day, or another 840 million who remain malnourished? Can we fully enjoy freedom from fear without having freedom from want, which emanates from living in an environment free from infectious disease, illiteracy, poverty, natural disaster and social unrest? If we are to give importance to protecting children from harmful effects during times of war, should we not give equal importance to providing children with basic benefits during times of peace? We cannot turn a blind eye to the need to secure for people their freedom from want. We believe that human beings will begin to enjoy genuine security only if they have a chance to make a living, to be able to stand on their own two feet, to have equal opportunities to develop their livelihoods and to make their own decisions about their own futures. This will not happen so long as people are threatened by socio-economic ills such as poverty, disease, environmental degradation and social vices, including drugs.

The need to pursue human security in such a broader and more comprehensive definition is made even more urgent by the multifaceted challenges that we face from unbridled globalization. Granted, globalization has created many important opportunities and benefits, such as the creation of more competitive world markets, which has led to greater efficiencies in production and faster economic growth. But I ask the question: has globalization helped eradicate poverty in the marginalized subregions of the world, or eliminated social and economic inequities even in the developed world? We cannot deny that uncontrolled market forces and unfettered short-term capital flows, to take but a few examples of globalization, have had devastating consequences on our economies, social cohesion, political stability and cultural identity — in many cases for the worse rather than for the better.

The events of the recent financial crisis in Asia have brought us face-to-face with the worst consequences of globalization. Millions of adults were unemployed and a large number of children were forced to leave school. But, if anything, the crisis has made us even more determined to meet this challenge, which, though primarily financial in nature, has had immense social consequences. We have learned that the multifaceted nature of the challenge of globalization requires a multifaceted response.

In our case, besides the traditional economic reforms and adjustments undertaken, we also sought to focus our efforts on addressing the short-term and long-term threats to the viability and welfare both of individuals and of our society. We therefore give strong priority to promoting the establishment of adequate social safety nets and the development of human resources. This strategy puts people at the centre of our national efforts to bring about our economic revival. I can proudly say that our efforts have finally borne fruit. We have emerged from the crisis more competitive, more resilient and better prepared, economically and socially.

At the global level, I firmly believe that to meet the challenges of globalization and take the most advantages from its benefits, we must join hands to promote globalization with a human face. This is not a new idea. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has spoken of it. The United Nations, particularly the United Nations Development Programme, has long been a proponent of this concept. Unfortunately, when it was introduced some years ago, it was still considered an idea far beyond its time. If we still find such a concept revolutionary, we are indeed behind the times.

We need to ensure that globalization leads us to, among other things, greater equity among peoples and nations; the easing of social tensions and the strengthening of communities; the inclusion of a greater number of economies as stakeholders and co-partners in the building of the global economy; declining poverty and

the reduction of the income gap between the very rich and the very poor; enhanced protection and preservation of our environment; greater protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and, perhaps most importantly and very simply, a better life for all peoples.

The holding of the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development — UNCTAD X — in Thailand in February 2000 will be an important, defining moment in our quest to promote globalization with a human face. We will consider all these challenges together. We hope to be able to tame the tsunami of globalization and turn it into a benevolent force of reconstruction and equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, and not the menacing force of destruction and destabilization it has thus far been.

I am pleased to report that our preparations for UNCTAD X are going well. I wish to take this opportunity to convey the Thai Government's assurance to all of you in the Assembly that Bangkok will be fully prepared for UNCTAD X in February 2000. Thailand, as the host country, strongly encourages all Member States to consider sending to Bangkok delegations at the highest level possible.

Joining hands to promote globalization with a human face is a distinct contribution to promoting human security. The United Nations is already playing a leadership role in realizing this goal at the global level. But the United Nations cannot do it alone. It needs to forge a partnership with the non-governmental sector, especially the private sector and civil society, and with other international organizations. In a sense, our endeavour to define and, indeed, to promote human security has philosophical and practical implications — both positive and negative — for us as sovereign States and for the United Nations as the leading global multilateral Organization. We are embarking on an effort to define what the key role of the United Nations will be in the next millennium. I urge all of us to contribute to this important mission together.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, His Excellency Youssouf Ouedraogo.

Mr. Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso) *(spoke in French)*: Your brilliant election, Mr. President, to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session pays tribute to your personal merits and your eminent qualities as a diplomat, and to your country, Namibia, a country that is to us a symbol of the struggle against oppression. First of all, allow me to address our most sincere and warm congratulations to you. Your country and Burkina Faso share the same ideals and values, and a similar vision of the future of Africa and the world. Suffice it to say that we extend to you in advance our willingness and cooperation for the success of your mission.

We must also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, who so brilliantly discharged his important responsibilities during this particularly trying year. I pay tribute as well to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose work at the helm of the United Nations deserves our appreciation and our fullest support.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the three new Members that have joined the great family of the United Nations — Tonga, Nauru and Kiribati.

This session of the General Assembly — the last of the century — is beginning at a time when recurring and persistent inter-State and inter-ethnic conflict and hostility are characteristic of the international scene.

The globalization of the international economy and the liberalization of world trade appear to have worsened the economic and social differences between peoples. The lofty objectives of our Organization — the promotion of peace, security, justice and equality — seem to be receding into the distance.

We are faced with increasing challenges, which is making the task of the United Nations more difficult. And yet we sense that the coming millennium will be a time of growth for our peoples, in particular those of the developing countries.

The waning century threw down every possible challenge, but it also gave rise to great hopes. It has been one of the most productive as regards legal instruments aimed at enhancing the protection and promotion of human rights. Nevertheless, grave dangers emerged during this period that came close to jeopardizing humankind's very existence. The memory of the two great wars remains very much alive.

It must be underscored that the United Nations — born of the general upheaval of the post-war period and charged with working towards peace and a genuine collective security for our world — has accomplished a great deal, with the assistance of regional or subregional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States, the

Association of South-East Asian Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and so on.

But despite all these efforts, the quest for peace remains an immense and difficult undertaking. On the international scene, wars, conflicts and confrontations of all stripes continue to rage, wiping out any progress made in the field of development.

In the Middle East, the level of tension between the parties remains very high, even though recent political changes have given rise to hopes of a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, particularly since the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September last.

In an international situation so fraught with conflict, we can only rejoice at seeing the spectre of war, which had seemed inevitable, recede from East Timor thanks to the wisdom and realism of the parties to this painful conflict.

I cannot fail to mention the military intervention of the NATO countries in Yugoslavia and more specifically in Kosovo, an operation whose legitimacy was supposedly based on the right of humanitarian intervention. But my country, Burkina Faso, is among those that believe that such an intervention should take place only on the basis of a clear and precise mandate and under the supervision of the United Nations.

Though the objective of this type of intervention — protecting a victimized minority — may seem defensible, the manner in which it was carried out is a cause for concern because it represents a challenge to the United Nations and to the basic norms of international law. Burkina Faso is gratified that the United Nations has taken up its proper role in the resolution of this conflict.

But Africa is undoubtedly the continent that has suffered the most from these crises. Though peace has been restored in Guinea-Bissau, and in Sierra Leone the Lomé Agreement, signed on 7 July 1999 with the active participation of Burkina Faso, has put an end to the gunfire, we must continue tirelessly to strive to resolve the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the Horn of Africa and in Angola.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a solution can be found if security issues, which remain the essential concerns of the various States involved in the conflict, are taken into consideration. Accordingly, Burkina Faso considers that the Lusaka agreements must be accepted by all of the parties if indeed they wish to give peace a chance.

Turning to the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, President Blaise Compaoré, during his tenure as the head of the high-level OAU delegation and in close cooperation with the United Nations, made every effort to promote a peaceful settlement of this conflict, in conformity with the mandate he was entrusted with at Ouagadougou by the thirty-fourth Summit of Heads of State or Government, in June 1998.

Our efforts led to the acceptance by both parties of the Ouagadougou framework agreement, and, at the thirty-fifth OAU Summit, held in Algiers, of the modalities for the implementation of that agreement. We are convinced that President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the current Chairman of the OAU, to whom we have passed the torch, will strive to ensure a successful outcome to this delicate situation. In doing so he will enjoy the continuing and vigorous support of the OAU Secretary General, Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, and the cooperation of the United Nations and all of the States that have played a very positive and discreet role in finding a pacific solution to the conflict between these two brotherly countries. To this end, he will require the cooperation of both parties and the support of all, particularly the United Nations.

The fratricidal conflict in Angola has lasted more than two decades, despite all of the sanctions and measures taken against Mr. Jonas Savimbi and his movement, UNITA. Burkina Faso is convinced that, as in other cases — particularly in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo — it is only through a dialogue between the parties that a just and lasting solution can be found.

It is clear that, because of their increasingly complex and interrelated nature, the various conflicts I have mentioned cannot be resolved in a just and lasting way unless the efforts of all are conjoined. This includes not only the parties to the conflict and the international community — meaning the United Nations — but also the regional and subregional organizations.

In this respect, we noted, throughout our mandate as Chairman of the OAU, the determination and commitment of this Organization fully to discharge its responsibilities, as evidenced by the various initiatives it has undertaken.

We stand convinced that Africa has resolutely considered the serious consequences these multiple conflicts entail for the economic and human development of its population. Accordingly, at the thirty-fifth OAU Summit in Algiers, it took the courageous and historic decision of declaring that the year 2000 would be a year of peace and security throughout the continent.

Of course, we know full well that in order for that objective to be attained, the support of the international community is crucial, not only at the political level, where its backing will be needed for the implementation of our decisions and resolutions, but also at the equally important level of logistics and material support, technical assistance and humanitarian considerations.

But any peace is fragile that is not backed by genuine disarmament. That is why we support all international initiatives in this field, in particular the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

My country has joined in the fight against anti-personnel mines by signing and ratifying the relevant Convention. Burkina Faso is gratified at the growing support of the international community for the initiative of the Economic Community of West African States relating to a moratorium on the production and transfer of light weapons. Together with other members of the international community, my country is also participating in peacekeeping operations, in particular in the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, it is distressing to note that the world economy is still dominated and controlled by a minority of States that manipulate its rules and the way it operates in their own interests and to the detriment of the interests of the great majority — the countries that make up the South.

With regard to social development, poverty has continued to increase in developing countries, where about 1.5 billion people — one quarter of the world's population — are living on less than $1 per capita per day. Food security is far from guaranteed in those countries, while in the affluent countries food is destroyed on a huge scale in order to stabilize prices. The scarcity of drinking water supplies and medical services condemns a third of humanity to a life expectancy of no more than 40 years. Illiteracy greatly limits the access of the poorest to knowledge and, by extension, to information about how their countries are run. The most disadvantaged and vulnerable strata — women, children and elderly people — do not fully enjoy the benefits of a legal protection system.

At a more general level, there are unacceptable disparities in international economic relations between the industrialized and the developing countries. The latter are becoming increasingly vulnerable because of the chronic structural imbalance in trade with the developed countries. Despite the decisions taken by the ministerial conferences of the World Trade Organization, the integration of the less advanced countries into the multilateral trading system is still an issue, particularly with regard to the special and differentiated treatment that should be granted to those countries. The greatest challenge in the twenty-first century will undoubtedly be the struggle against the marginalization of the countries of the South.

The burden of debt remains a constant concern, too, despite the initiative of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative and the important decisions taken by the Group of Seven Summit in Cologne, which I welcome.

In order to promote the genuine and lasting human development to which all developing countries aspire, we must work for greater justice and equity in international trade, through the implementation of various measures, including price stabilization and export guarantees for the products of developing countries through the revaluation of raw materials and the stabilization of export earnings; index-linking of the prices of raw materials to those of industrial products; free access for the products the South to northern markets through the elimination of protectionist measures; reform of the Bretton Woods institutions to bring them into line with the needs and preoccupations of the developing countries; and the promotion of a genuine North-South dialogue. In this respect, Burkina Faso welcomes with interest and satisfaction the European initiative to hold an economic summit next year for the European Union countries and their African partners.

As everyone knows, we can make many plans, have many ambitious dreams and imagine all sorts of transformations for our world. But if we do not place justice, equity and solidarity at the heart of all our projects, they will remain fantasies. Justice demands, for example, that we not starve a population through the use of international sanctions in order to punish its Government. Since I am touching upon that subject, I would like to reaffirm our full solidarity with the Libyan

Arab Jamahiriya, and I hope that, as a result of the concessions made by that country with regard to the Lockerbie affair, the unfair sanctions against the brotherly Libyan people will be lifted for good. Since the historic decision at Ouagadougou, this requirement has become imperative, in our view.

In this context, the issue of the Republic of China on Taiwan also deserves attention. In the interests of equity and of the principle of universality, Burkina Faso believes that it is unfair virtually to ostracize 22 million Chinese people. That is why we firmly support the initiative to create a study group to examine the particular and exceptional situation of the Republic of China on Taiwan so as to determine how that entity could be represented in the United Nations.

In that connection, in the interests of justice within international relations, we must restructure the Organization so that we can better respond to the demands of our time and the expectations of humanity. If the United Nations is to be more democratic and more just, such reform must go to the heart of its main body, the Security Council, whose composition and operating methods must be reviewed and corrected. The operational capacities of the Organization — the structures and activities linked to the promotion of economic and social development — must also be strengthened.

Burkina Faso believes the human being to be the supreme measure of all things. That is why human rights and the dignity of humankind are at the centre of our concerns. In fact, since 1991, my country has been steadfastly undertaking an irreversible process of democratization that has led to several rounds of municipal, legislative and presidential elections under conditions recognized by international observers as being calm and unbiased. The process is being consolidated and the culture of democracy and citizenship in a republican system is well under way. The stability and security of our country in the current turbulent environment bear witness to that fact.

We believe that no price can be placed on democracy and freedom. That is why we will spare no effort to strengthen and extend those values. Burkina Faso intends to make a modest contribution to building a more human world of greater justice and solidarity, because we are convinced that the new international order to which we all aspire requires that political, economic and social forces throughout the world join hands and become catalysts of progress for the benefit of humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, His Excellency Mr. Louis Michel.

Mr. Michel (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I should like first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly and to thank you for having accepted the weighty task that you will be carrying out during this session. We also wish to express our best wishes to your country, Namibia, which you so ably represent. We also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Opertti, for the manner in which he guided our work during the previous session.

I should also like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere congratulations to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission to our Organization.

My statement is in line with the statement made here by the Presidency of the European Union. I wish merely to highlight some of the issues that are particularly important for us.

Early in the month of August, two young African children, Yaguine and Fodé, were found dead, stowed away in the landing gear of a Sabena aeroplane, victims of an idealism and an innocence that led them to embark on a reckless voyage in search of the mirages of western society.

Yaguine and Fodé left us a moving message, of which I would like to quote some passages here:

> "To the people in charge in Europe: it is to your solidarity and to your kindness that we make an appeal for help for Africa ... We are suffering enormously ... We have war, disease ... We have schools, but in order to get a good education and good teaching, one needs large amounts of money; and our parents are poor.
>
> "So, we Africans, especially African children and young people, ask you to create a great and effective organization for Africa ... We need you to fight poverty".

The great organization of which Yaguine and Fodé dreamed is here before me in its most universal form. It was conceived from the outset for the maintenance of peace and for economic and social development. The authors of the Charter regarded those two aspects as

inseparable. Over the last decade, this great Organization has succeeded in laying a worldwide foundation for economic and social values aimed at creating a more civilized world, a world in which globalization has gradually come to the fore.

Here I am thinking of the discrete but tenacious work at the great United Nations conferences and summits to find new directions for development. That significant work must be continued and consolidated. The universal commitments made at Jomtien for education, at Rio de Janeiro for the environment, at Vienna for human rights, at Copenhagen for social development, at Cairo for population and development, at Beijing for women, at Rome for hunger and at Istanbul for human settlements constitute irreversible gains for mankind. It is gratifying that the concerns debated and the conclusions adopted at those conferences have increasingly become the inspiration for our national policies and are helping to bring about the indispensable convergence among those policies.

But the tragedy of Yaguine and Fodé brings us face to face with the harsh reality of unbalanced development. As I speak, 1.3 billion women and men are surviving — or trying to survive — on less than one dollar per day; 840 million of them, including 160 million children, suffer daily from hunger or malnutrition. Even more serious, as those two teenagers remind us, 260 million children have no access to primary or secondary school because of a lack of means. Every day, 250 million children go to work instead of to school. At the dawn of the third millennium, it is increasingly difficult for our civilization to tolerate such social and human marginalization and such a lack of solidarity, in particular for our children.

We must forge stronger solidarity within the United Nations. We must restore humanism to its rightful place in international relations. For this fight against poverty and this campaign for emancipation to succeed, we must agree to a decisive review of the mechanism that underlies the economic fluctuation, that causes financial tension and its attendant social consequences, and that tolerates massive exploitation of the weakest by forces that are often impersonal and unidentifiable.

Hence, we are deeply convinced that we must restore the primacy of political leadership in our globalized society. We must endeavour without hidden agendas to organize a new world political order. We need stronger and more coherent United Nations action for economic and social development, which requires the use of all available global tools for economic, financial and commercial governance. This means we must be more determined to restoring the primacy of policy and no longer to permit democratic legitimacy to be circumvented or even flouted by selfish or speculative interests. The rights of peoples must always prevail over the power of money.

Belgium will support United Nations efforts to restore the Organization's mission to protect against the unacceptable side-effects of globalization. In that spirit, my country attaches great importance to the success of the coming Millennium Assembly. In that context, Belgium is pleased that it will serve as host to the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in the spring of 2001, which will bring together in Brussels all development partners. We hope that this major event will lead to a renewed commitment to the integration of these countries in the world economy on the basis of concrete and quantifiable objectives. The Belgian Government, which recently came into office, has clearly expressed its political will gradually to increase our funding of bilateral partnerships and cooperation. We shall pay particular attention to the quality and the coherent implementation of the projects we sponsor.

I express the wish that this Assembly session be conducted under the banner of Africa. Your stimulating opening statement, Mr. President, and the addresses by President Mbeki of South Africa and by President Bouteflika of Algeria, sent a strong message in that regard. We Belgians have a traditional interest in the political, economic and development prospects of Central Africa. Belgium must reestablish the bonds with that region which history and experience have bestowed upon it. This also implies responsibilities which my Government will endeavour to shoulder in a responsible and coherent manner. I am thinking in particular of the twofold task of the United Nations as an organization both for the maintenance of peace and for the promotion of development. I also have in mind human rights issues, of which my Government is particularly aware.

Against this backdrop, the new Belgian Government has placed cooperation with Central Africa at the top of its agenda. To us, it is important that peace and stability should return to Central Africa. The Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement offers hope. It requires the political will of the various parties concerned to address the root causes of the present conflict and to seek solutions at a regional level. A significant effort by the international community will be necessary to encourage and support them. My country will do its share, and will intensify its direct

contacts and its financial support. Belgium has responded to the appeal of the Security Council by placing liaison officers at the disposal of the Secretary-General. They will be deployed in accordance with Security Council resolution 1258 (1999) of 6 August 1999.

It goes without saying that we fully respect the wish of African leaders that they should find their own political solutions to the conflicts that undermine the continent. But this can imply no ambiguity about the roles of the Security Council and of the General Assembly. Nor does it mean that the rest of the world should refrain from action: achieving peace in the Great Lakes region will require tremendous efforts and resources.

Here we must think about concluding a true partnership pact with the countries of Central Africa. Inspired by the Stability Pact for the Balkans, this would form part of a genuine strategy for cooperation among countries. With the support of the major financial institutions, such a pact could revitalize the economic mechanisms of partner countries and reinvigorate their social and democratic development. We believe such s partnership pact should be based on the voluntary and mutually respectful cooperation of each African and non-African signatory country and should in no way be construed as an attempt at neo-colonial domineering of that part of the world.

Other regions of Africa deserve more attention and effort on the part of the international community. I think in particular of the bloody conflict which has plunged Angola into unspeakable humanitarian tragedy. I also think of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which must be prevented from extending into Somalia. In Sierra Leone, the efforts of neighbouring countries, which Belgium and other partners have supported, give reason for optimism. We also hope that Guinea-Bissau will regain civil peace. But much remains to be done to improve the situation of the peoples of southern Sudan and of Somalia.

Whatever the media's focus, now turned towards other parts of the world, it is important that we do not forget the suffering of men, women and especially children of those countries of Africa, who aspire to education, health and development. The new international policies, based more on balance and on the sharing of prosperity, should be directed towards them, too.

I turn briefly to North Africa. The presidency of the European Union recalled that the Maghreb countries are experiencing significant growth. They remain an essential partner for Europe and for world peace, prosperity and development. Economic, social, cultural and political ties with the southern Mediterranean basin will have to be strengthened in the coming months and years.

I also hope that the international Community will fulfil its commitment to support the Middle East peace process. There, too, it will be a matter of releasing the financial and human resources to ensure the economic, social and democratic development of the various regions and peoples who are committed to peace. My country is ready to respond to calls for cooperation in this regard.

There is another region where the United Nations has been called upon to play a crucial and difficult role. The Kosovo crisis has implications for the security of my country and Europe as a whole. It also obliges us to ask a sensitive question about the limits to the right of the international community to intervene in the internal affairs of a State.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention has appreciably reinforced the idea that moral and ethical considerations are in the process of overshadowing the traditional concept of national sovereignty in international relations. If there is one lesson for our Organization to learn from the twentieth century, it is that for no State can the massacre of its own people be considered an "internal affair", under any pretext. This legal formalism would ultimately amount to admitting that, as the head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Bernard Kouchner has said, it would be "legitimate, although not elegant, to massacre one's own people".

Yet the Security Council is well-equipped to deal with massive violations of human rights. Article 42 of the United Nations Charter allows the Council to qualify such violations as a threat to international peace and security and to authorize armed intervention, as it has on several occasions — for example, in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991; in Somalia in 1992; in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1994; and in Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1997.

If the Security Council could not fully play its role at the beginning of the Kosovo crisis, this was due less to a divergence of views between States over the essence of the problem than because there was a rift between the advocates of the right of humanitarian intervention and the defenders of the traditional legal system, which regards national sovereignty as the absolute foundation of international relations. My country deeply regrets that a

potential double veto constituted an insurmountable obstacle that was inappropriate given the extreme urgency of the situation. We hope that resorting to force without the Council's approval will not constitute a precedent. The world needs an international legal order that prevails over the law of the jungle. In this respect, we all hope that resolution 1244 (1999) signals a return to international legality.

Belgium welcomes the decisive attitude of the Security Council regarding East Timor. We hope for a speedy restoration of normality there, with the return of its inhabitants, reconstruction of the country and the establishment of a state of law resulting from the expressed will of its people.

Here it is opportune to recall the urgent need for the international community to provide itself with the tools needed to prevent and punish barbaric acts. We need a tribunal charged with prosecuting those responsible for the gravest crimes affecting the whole international community. The adoption in Rome of the Statute of the International Criminal Court is an important landmark. I appeal to all States to sign and ratify it so that the Court can start to operate as soon as possible. Belgium's ratification of the Statute is imminent. This new tribunal must be endowed with the human and material means necessary for the accomplishment of its mission.

This leads me to the issue of United Nations reform, and primarily the reform of the Security Council.

For six years a Working Group under the guidance of the President of the General Assembly has attempted, with more or less success, to ascertain which reforms would make it possible to re-gild the coat of arms of the Security Council. In spite of the efforts of successive Presidents, little progress has been made. Nevertheless, the scope of the issue and possible improvements have been identified. I believe that new momentum can come only from a new determination on the part of our Governments.

In the view of my country, the Security Council is an anachronistic reflection of the world of 1946. In 53 years the number of independent countries has grown fourfold, and new great Powers can, whether on economic, demographic or geopolitical grounds, legitimately claim a larger share of international responsibility.

The reasons for reform are evident. Lack of it, continuance of the status quo and opposition to change involve the following dangers.

Countries which are legitimate candidates for a permanent seat on the Security Council, frustrated in their ambitions, will be less inclined to contribute to the collective effort to maintain peace, prevent conflict and give multilateral development aid. Equally, other countries, unable to justifiably claim a permanent seat, will be deprived of participation in shouldering global responsibilities, because of their number and the lack of objective rotation criteria. That will bring about a loss of representativeness and legitimacy, and ultimately of the Council's authority.

My country chairs a group of 10 Member States seeking a solution that can command the broadest possible support. In spite of the obstacles, we intend to persevere.

The reforms that we are considering are not limited to the Security Council: they also aim at rendering the machinery of the United Nations more effective and efficient. I pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has thrown himself into the task with great determination.

The United Nations continues to be an indispensable Organization. It must be strengthened so that it can carry out the tasks and responsibilities given it by the Charter. Reform is therefore essential to strengthen the mechanisms for the solidarity and harmonious development to which we all aspire.

This reform must be accompanied by a sound financial outlook. There has been no improvement over the last 12 months; this situation must be redressed. Belgium, like the many other States which pay their contributions on time and unconditionally, calls for all Member States to do the same. It will be understood, of course, that here I am looking particularly towards Washington. Belgium, a friend and ally of the United States, reaffirms that it is essential that that country play its role in the United Nations. We all need the United States, but it must shoulder its responsibilities, including its financial responsibilities, within our Organization.

So far I have mostly spoken of what is not working. But there are many areas where progress, even considerable progress, is being made. The Organization has played a considerable role in giving an ethical dimension to the criteria governing international relations. My country welcomes this. As the first victim of chemical weapons — gas used on the battlefields of the Yser — Belgium was a passionate advocate of the process

that led to the conclusion and the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Similarly, we are supporting the efforts to combat biological and bacteriological weapons and the fight to abolish anti-personnel mines. We are also presently engaged in efforts to reduce the spread of small arms.

The anarchistic accumulation of small arms and the scourge of anti-personnel mines remain among the most acute problems at this close of the century. These weapons exacerbate conflicts and are instruments of death and terror, in Africa as well as in Asia, Latin America and the Balkans. Nor do the societies of Western Europe and North America escape this cancer, the full extent of which has yet to be felt.

Several initiatives have been taken to tackle these problems, and my country was fully involved in them. By way of example I would like to mention the Brussels conference of October 1998 and the Code of Conduct and the common action of the European Union, as well as our participation in and financial support for the expert groups set up by the Secretary General.

We will continue our policy of prevention and reduction with regard to accumulations of small arms, as well as our fight for the abolition of anti-personnel mines.

In general, in the appropriate forums we will continue to take initiatives to promote arms control and disarmament. I am thinking, for example, of the reinforcement of the Biological Weapons Convention, limitations on arms-trafficking, the intensification of the fight against the violation of embargoes on weapons transfers and the fight against the increase of nuclear arsenals.

From economic and social development to disarmament or humanitarian intervention, there is a central theme that underlies all our actions: human rights. It has become clearer and clearer in the past few years that human rights are intertwined with the promotion of international peace and security, economic prosperity, sustainable development and social justice.

In all the reforms of the activities and the structures of the United Nations that have been carried out with the impetus of the Secretary-General, the promotion of human rights is a cross-cutting theme involving all the organizations and agencies that operate on a global scale. Belgium supports this global and integrated approach without reservations; but the task is immense. Thus, it is in the interest of the United Nations to ensure the collaboration of regional organizations, whose competencies and potential in this field can help in the achievement of these common objectives.

The inaugural address of the new Belgian Government unequivocally put human rights at the top of its agenda and announced its intention of pursuing an active policy within all the relevant international organizations.

I would like to pay particular homage to our Secretary-General, whose patience and tact have often made the difference in extremely difficult circumstances. My Government remains a steadfast supporter of all his initiatives to prepare our Organization for the challenges, known and unknown, that lie ahead in the next century.

Through the Secretary-General I would like to pay special tribute to the United Nations personnel, and particularly to all those who died on the field of honour in humanitarian or peacekeeping missions. Every year the list of victims gets longer. My country appeals to the global conscience to respect United Nations personnel and to ensure that crimes against them do not go unpunished.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that the actions of the Secretary-General will make our Organization more credible and more effective, for the United Nations remains the indispensable universal instrument to achieve our common goals. It is a beacon in an increasingly interdependent world, a source of hope for the Yaguines and Fodés of all the continents.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, His Excellency Mr. Juan Gabriel Valdés.

Mr. Valdés (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like first of all to express to you, Sir, our warm congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We join the earlier delegations in wishing you success in the important task of guiding our debates.

I would like to express to your predecessor, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, Mr. Didier Opertti, our gratitude for his outstanding leadership as President of the Assembly at its fifty-third session.

I also wish to convey very special greetings to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to express our deep appreciation for the work that he has done and our firm support for his efforts to achieve peace in a year that has been of critical importance for the United Nations.

Chile extends a hearty welcome to the new Member States of our Organization, Kiribati, Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, fraternal countries of the Pacific community.

Globalization and interdependence require new and stronger international institutions. As the international environment becomes increasingly complex and difficult, the United Nations, with all its limitations, remains the only global actor capable of addressing not only the problems of cooperation and global conflict, but also issues that, by their very nature, are no longer within the exclusive competence of States.

The expansion of the international agenda and the need for collective management of the problems of interdependence are the impetus for this trend. The issue of democracy, or rather of the lack of democracy, has ceased to be exclusively a sovereign matter for countries to deal with; it has become a universal concern that no Government can ignore. Protection of the environment has an indisputable international dimension, inasmuch as issues of vital importance for our future, such as climate change, the pollution and over-exploitation of the oceans, the deterioration of the ozone layer and growing desertification, all require global remedies. Increasingly strict international regimes are being established for the regulation and prohibition of weapons of mass destruction and for the elimination of anti-personnel landmines. The fight against drug-trafficking can be truly effective only if it is waged within a framework of close regional and international cooperation, based on the principle of shared responsibility. Such moving issues as the treatment of refugees, the fight against hunger and major epidemics fall squarely within the scope of multilateral action. The Government of Chile enthusiastically supports this trend towards a new multilateralism.

The crisis in Kosovo revealed one of the most serious weaknesses and contradictions of the United Nations. The policies of ethnic cleansing supported by the Serbian leadership in that region required an immediate and vigorous response by the international community.

It was truly regrettable that our Organization was prevented from the outset from taking action with the vigour that the situation required. It was also regrettable that the solution to the crisis was found outside the appropriate framework of United Nations mechanisms and in contravention of the principles of the Charter. There is clearly a responsibility shared by all the permanent members of the Security Council for the inadequate functioning of the mechanisms of collective security. Once again, it was evident that the veto or the threat of its use can reduce to impotence the world's principal organ of collective security. Once again, it was evident that, when this occurs, a vacuum is created that can lead to the unilateral use of force without the prior authorization of the Security Council.

More recently, the United Nations has had to face a new challenge, a fresh humanitarian tragedy that it had to stop at all costs. I refer to the crisis in East Timor. Chile supported with hope and enthusiasm the holding of the referendum on 30 August, which was made possible by the significant agreement reached between Indonesia and Portugal under United Nations auspices.

A Chilean delegation of two distinguished parliamentarians was able to observe the successful organization of the electoral process and the admirable work of the United Nations volunteers and staff. They also witnessed the onset of the incidents that culminated in the massacre of which we are all aware. These acts are totally unacceptable. We are pleased that the Republic of Indonesia has requested the intervention of the United Nations to put an end to violence on the island. We are encouraged by the fact that, after so many unnecessary deaths, it has been possible to organize a multinational force under the efficient leadership of Australia.

I wish to reiterate and reaffirm the commitment of Chile to the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. Without interruption since 1949, my country has lent its cooperation to several of these operations. Today, we are expanding our participation in this field and have decided to contribute to the peacekeeping forces deployed in Kosovo and in East Timor. In February, Chile formally joined the reserve forces system. We have already identified the personnel to be kept at the ready in terms of military units, police monitors and civilian experts.

I wish to stress the importance that we attach to the implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which Chile has signed and for which it is

completing the formalities required for its approval by our National Congress. In keeping with the spirit and purpose of that instrument, I reiterate my country's commitment not to produce, export, import or lay any new anti-personnel landmines, as we demonstrated last April in our official declaration of a unilateral moratorium.

My country notes with optimism and hope the positive signs that have recently emerged with regard to the long-awaited resumption of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian people. Chile has resolutely supported this process from the very beginning and noted with great concern its virtual paralysis. We hope that the Israelis and the Palestinians alike will have the courage and resolve to opt unambiguously for dialogue and peace.

Chile expresses its concern and frustration at the obstacles that continue to block the self-determination referendum provided for under the United Nations Settlement Plan for Western Sahara. We hope that the date that has been set will be honoured so that the Sahraoui people can have the opportunity to express their preference in a free, informed and transparent manner.

Latin America has continued to make significant contributions to international peace and stability throughout the year. A final settlement has been achieved in the border conflict between two fraternal peoples on our continent: Ecuador and Peru. As one of the four guarantor countries of the 1941 treaty by which those two countries are bound, Chile is pleased to have contributed to the rapprochement between the parties and to have facilitated the dialogue that led this year to the settlement of their differences and the signing of a peace agreement.

The border between Argentina and Chile is one of the longest in the world. Numerous disagreements have arisen in the past over its demarcation. Thanks to the political will of the two nations, it has been possible to find solutions to each one of these problems. I have the deep satisfaction of announcing to this Assembly that we have reached a settlement with Argentina on the last remaining border dispute between our peoples. Our Parliaments have adopted the Campo de Hielo Sur agreement and we can now concentrate without distraction on the task of developing a relationship of peace, friendship and cooperation and a true strategic alliance between our two countries.

Four years have passed since, on the occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Member States undertook to intensify efforts to reform and democratize the Organization's structures in order to equip it to deal with the new and complex challenges that it faces in a constantly changing international environment. We must acknowledge, however, that little progress has been made. It has become a truism to point to the changes that have occurred in the international system set up after the Second World War. Less frequently mentioned is the fact that the institutions have not kept pace with these changes.

Chile has stressed the need for due importance to be given to the process of reforming the General Assembly as the prime deliberative and decision-making body of the entire system. It is only here that all Member States are represented on an equal footing.

On this occasion, we reaffirm our position that the reform of the Security Council must take into account such criteria and principles as the sovereign equality of States, equitable geographic representation and the need to create conditions for a functioning that would guarantee greater transparency and democracy in the working methods and procedures of that body. The persistence of the veto — which, moreover, can be exercised without any public justification — represents a serious obstacle to the achievement of substantive agreements. It is a fact that most of the obstacles to the admission of new permanent members are directly related to the right of veto that accompanies such membership.

Clearly, the loosening of regulations that govern the free circulation across borders of the knowledge, goods and capital that are characteristic elements of globalization has entailed significant benefits for our societies. It is also true, however, that globalization has thrown up new challenges and, in some cases, new risks, particularly those associated with capital movement.

The international financial crisis of recent years has demonstrated our ongoing vulnerability to events that we cannot control and for which we are not entirely responsible. Following the near collapse of the international financial system, the demand for structural reform has increased exponentially. Today, while the situation appears more hopeful, nothing has changed in substance. The systemic risks remain. We must relaunch, with fresh impetus and vigour, the necessary reform process to stabilize the international financial system in the future.

Capital flows far exceed the value of world trade. It is ironic that, while we have devoted so much effort to

establishing new trade regimes throughout the world, so little has been done in the field of international finance. The point is certainly not to impede the international flow of capital, but to establish an appropriate international framework to address the problems to which it may give rise. We cannot continue to be passive spectators as financial crises interrupt world growth and limit the development of our countries.

It is also essential that we put all our energies into the new round of multilateral trade negotiations that is just beginning. The multilateral trade system, reflected most accurately in the World Trade Organization, must be strengthened with a view to ensuring sustained and genuinely equitable growth for all countries. It is essential that the new round soon to start in Seattle be balanced so as to reflect the interests of developed and developing countries alike. We also hope that it will be comprehensive in its thematic coverage. We oppose a limited approach in the form of sectoral trade negotiations.

In the framework of the agendas of United Nations summits and conferences, the closing decade has witnessed gatherings at the highest level to consider the urgent social problems that beset mankind. From Copenhagen to Rio de Janeiro, Beijing to Cairo, Vienna to New York, the United Nations has accomplished a superlative task in reviewing problems and adopting programmes of action in the most important social spheres. In this connection, we attach the greatest importance to the follow-up and implementation of agreements emanating from the World Summit for Social Development. A special session of the General Assembly, to be held in Geneva next June, should renew the international community's commitment to the process begun in Copenhagen.

We welcome the recent Convention of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the prohibition of the most severe forms of child labour. We are confident that that organization, under the leadership of our fellow Chilean, Mr. Juan Somavía, will play an increasingly relevant role in the new international social agenda.

Violations of the basic rights of individuals can no longer be considered an exclusively domestic problem of a country. Protection of these rights is the inescapable task of the international community. This has been recognized by Chile, which, since regaining democracy in 1990, has firmly and sincerely supported the establishment of effective universal and regional regimes for the protection of human rights. We must bear in mind that the international regime for the protection of human rights is fragmentary and evolving. It consists of a set of standards and institutions that are gradually beginning to be applied with many gaps and imperfections. It should also be noted that this regime is being applied within the context of a certain international reality characterized by important differences in the relative power of countries and by selective and sometimes paternalistic practices.

Genocide and massive violations of human rights are destined to fall within the competence of international tribunals. Chile welcomes that tendency, but it also recognizes that we are now in a transitional stage of the process of globalization of justice. In this stage the norms of jurisdictions are not clear and are subject to various interpretations, including some that may be arbitrary and erroneous.

Chile regained its democracy almost 10 years ago. My Government represents those who fought for nearly two decades to restore Chile's tradition of freedom. Our economy has experienced remarkable growth during this period. We scrupulously respect human rights. We participate avidly in furthering Latin American integration. We are adhering to the new regimes being established by the international community in very diverse spheres.

We have also faced the dilemma of administering justice with respect to violations of human rights that occurred in the past in our country. This choice has led to considerable tension. Many countries that began the process of transition to democracy in more favourable conditions than Chile's preferred to circumvent such tensions by refraining from prosecuting very serious crimes that occurred during the previous regimes.

In these circumstances, what grounds would exist for the judiciary of a third State to exercise jurisdiction with respect to acts that are currently the subject of proceedings in the court of the State in which those acts were committed? There is no denial of justice in Chile. We do not accept impunity for human rights violations. The Government has initiated a broad dialogue to deal with the consequences of the most serious human rights violations that occurred in our country, particularly the tragedy of those who were arrested and disappeared. At present nearly 300 cases relating to human rights violations committed during the authoritarian regime that governed our country between 1973 and 1990 are being tried in Chilean courts. In several cases, the Chilean courts have convicted the accused and have sentenced

them to prison terms that are now being served in penitentiaries.

We would understand if the organized international community attempted to administer justice in countries in which the rule of law did not prevail or where the most basic human rights continued to be trampled. But in a democratic State the task of administering justice must be undertaken by that State and its institutions.

The Government of Chile considers it highly undesirable that judges of other countries should claim jurisdiction to intervene directly in that process. This claim to jurisdiction, based on the principle of separation of powers, means plainly and simply ignoring the principle of the juridical equality of States. Interference in matters within our country's jurisdiction is inappropriate and misplaced and is tantamount to a lack of respect for our State of law and our democracy. Today this interference affects Chile and other fraternal countries of the Southern Cone of Latin America. Tomorrow it may extend to the rest of the international community, leading to juridical chaos and competing judicial claims that will end up damaging the international relations of many of our countries.

But our reaction to these imperfections and discriminatory practices is not to seek refuge in outdated principles and notions. On the contrary: we must move forward towards a clear, orderly and non-discriminatory regime, such as the one envisaged in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The establishment of a permanent organ designed to exercise criminal jurisdiction over persons accused of any of the crimes over which it has competence will have the virtue of discouraging both improper internal procedures that guarantee the impunity of the perpetrators and attempts by judges in other countries to make themselves the righteous of the world.

I wish to conclude by expressing prudent optimism for the future of our Organization. Many States and other actors, such as non-governmental organizations that make up our increasingly vibrant international civil society, would like to raise the standing of the United Nations. We hope that the Millennium Assembly, to which we have given all our support, will become the symbol of a renewed and much stronger United Nations as it faces the new century.

The President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta, His Excellency The Honourable Joseph Borg.

Mr. Borg (Malta): I join other delegations in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the General Assembly. Your experience and diplomatic skills will undoubtedly guide us successfully through the fifty-fourth session. I would also like to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, who displayed such competence and ability in conducting our work during the past year. We would also like to express our deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his incessant diplomatic intervention to help resolve conflicts in various parts of the globe.

May I also take this opportunity to offer our most sincere congratulations to the three new Members of this Organization, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republic of Kiribati. I should also add that Malta already cooperates closely with these three new Members through our joint membership of the Commonwealth.

For over half a century the United Nations has been instrumental in fostering a culture of partnership among States. The foundation and survival of a universal Organization entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of social justice, freedom and human rights is an unprecedented achievement in the history of mankind. Undeniably, great strides have been made by this Organization in helping forge swords into ploughshares through enhanced cooperation between its Member States. We have striven individually and collectively, painfully at times and imperfectly at others, towards a process of political, social, economic and technological evolution. Globalization has become a central concept in the way we view the world. Interdependence has consequently become the norm.

Overshadowing such progress, however, are the armed conflicts, economic imbalances and social dislocation that we still face. Events in our days show that gross violations of human rights and disregard for humanitarian principles continue to plague us. The atrocities that human beings are capable of inflicting on one another defy the noble aspirations that inspired the birth of our Organization. The irony of such a situation cannot be lost on anyone. Even less can the tragedy of such a predicament be ignored.

Vicious armed conflicts, such as those we have been witnessing in parts of Africa and in the Balkans, not to mention the atrocities recently perpetrated in East Timor,

continue to destroy an untold number of lives, disrupting entire societies, traumatizing tens of thousands of men, women and children and diverting precious resources away from development.

Mr. Ingolfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The international community cannot afford to be complacent about the humanitarian crises that we are witnessing today. It is incumbent on each of us to rise to the challenge of securing a world free from deprivation, fear and oppression. Strengthening the United Nations to become better equipped to address contemporary needs and to meet the challenges of the future thus becomes more urgent. The role of the United Nations in the promotion of preventive diplomacy must increasingly assume particular importance if, collectively, we are to defuse and resolve potentially destructive situations.

Peace and security are intimately intertwined with development and prosperity. Too often, lack of development precipitates conflict. Promoting development helps prevent wars and acts as a means of creating channels of cooperation within, as well as among, nations. This was the essential message emanating from the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. It was a commitment to consolidate the partnership of nations, a commitment restated and underscored during the review conferences held within the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

Democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law are essential foundations for the attainment of peace and development and for upholding the dignity of the human person. Where these are absent, our efforts to implement post-conflict peace-building, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes in war-torn areas must be intensified. The importance of cementing ceasefire agreements with stable political and economic institutions, while simultaneously creating partnerships between Governments and civil society, cannot be underestimated.

One of the main thrusts of the work of the United Nations has been aimed at the equitable and long-lasting reform of the Security Council, especially given the expanded membership of the Organization. It is in the interest of all to find a solution to the Council's reform that will ensure its smooth functioning, transparency and enhanced relevance.

While the root causes of conflicts are complex, the illegal proliferation and trafficking of weapons clearly has a destabilizing effect on society and only serves to prolong conflicts. Increased global efforts are warranted to monitor and control the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons. The emerging global consensus on the issue is encouraging. Malta looks forward to the eventual convening of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects. Addressing this disruptive phenomenon becomes more urgent when it is compounded by its complex linkages with other equally destabilizing activities, such as international crime, drug trafficking and terrorism.

Responsibility for the plight of peoples cannot be shirked by national Governments. Accountability by individuals for their actions must be enforced. The international community's outrage at shocking, massive violations of human rights has found expression in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The adoption of the Statute last year in Rome constituted an important milestone. It is Malta's hope that it is only a matter of time before the Court begins to function.

Heinous crimes against humanity are an affront to the intrinsic values of civilization. They cannot be tolerated. Likewise, the shameless disregard for human rights that have been enshrined in various international instruments cannot go unheeded. Effective protection of those rights should not be allowed to fall victim to excuses of national sovereignty. This is even more compelling given that only last year we commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The international community has made great headway in the way it deals with the world's resources to safeguard the heritage of future generations. Since it joined the Organization 35 years ago, Malta has played an active role in this field. It would be remiss of me today not to pay tribute to Professor Arvid Pardo, Malta's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations, who sadly passed away recently. His diplomatic skills and judicious acumen, as well as his vision, were instrumental in developing the concept of the common heritage of mankind. This concept, so ably launched by Professor Pardo on behalf of the Malta Government, was the key to the process that eventually led to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In a similar vein, during the last session, my delegation was active in promoting the idea of a better

and more substantive discussion on oceans through improved coordination among the various organs dealing with the subject. In this regard, it is our hope that a workable solution to this issue will be reached.

Malta's readiness to play an active and positive role in the furtherance of international peace and cooperation has led to the reactivation of our application for membership in the European Union. In September of last year, following elections and a change in Government, Malta reactivated its application, which had been frozen for the previous two years. The application had been submitted in 1990, and by the time it was suspended in 1996, Malta was widely considered as a prime candidate for early membership of the European Union. The 1998 reactivation was therefore generally seen, both within and outside Malta, as a resumption of unfinished business, rather than as a new beginning.

The contractual basis of our present relationship with the Union remains the Association Agreement signed in 1970, as subsequently amplified and amended. Until it is superseded by membership, we expect this Agreement to remain in force and to continue to be complemented by additional measures in both traditional and new areas of cooperation, including the areas of justice and home affairs.

We see our objective to join the European Union as the most appropriate response to Malta's historical and cultural heritage, as well as to the economic, social and security requirements of our national development. The accession negotiations that we hope to be conducting in the near future will be guided by this perception. The outcome of these negotiations will then be submitted to the judgement of the Maltese people in a referendum.

Since independence in 1964, Malta has been steadfastly committed to the critical role that multilateral cooperation, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter, is increasingly playing in the endeavour towards progress, justice and stability within and among nations.

Over the years, notwithstanding constraints imposed by its size and resources, Malta has engaged itself in many United Nations-sponsored initiatives related to the promotion of human rights, economic and social development, disarmament, the peaceful settlement of disputes and safeguarding the environment. As members of the European Union, we expect to find increased opportunities, as well as to benefit from an increased capacity to pursue these and related objectives at both the global and regional level.

This certainty springs from our conviction that the European Union is at the forefront of endeavours to strengthen international understanding and cooperation. Its policies towards enlargement and regional cooperation, the promotion of economic and social development, conflict resolution and peacekeeping provide a constant gauge of its relevance in this regard.

Malta views the enlargement of the European Union not so much as an option but rather as a fulfilment. Each enlargement step constitutes fulfilment for the Union itself, and that contributes to the completion of an historical process that reverses the age-old conflict and the fragmentation of the European continent. It is also a fulfilment for a candidate country like Malta in that membership assures it of a continuing role in the political and economic life of the continent where most of its history and culture were, and continue to be, forged.

The unfolding of events in Europe over the last decade highlights this fundamental dimension of the Union's enlargement process. As they emerged from political suppression and economic stagnation, the Central and Eastern European States immediately defined their national aspirations within the framework of European integration. For its part, the European Union recognized that the objective of membership for all the Central and Eastern European States was a vital ingredient in sustaining stability and progress throughout the continent in the shorter and the longer term. Significantly, in spite of the complexities involved, there is already a marked readiness by the Union to contribute both assistance and funds towards reconstruction in the Balkans while simultaneously pursuing enlargement through Central and Eastern Europe and with the two Mediterranean islands — Malta and Cyprus.

Cooperation with the neighbouring regions and around the world is, for the European Union, an indispensable accompaniment to enlargement. Be it in the traditional transatlantic domain, on the still-evolving Eastern border or on its historical southern, Mediterranean border, the Union provides a constant and credible reassurance of the outward-looking dimension embedded in the European integration process.

Straddling, as it does, both the horizontal and the vertical axes of the Mediterranean, Malta attaches particular importance to the promotion of cooperation in

this area. It is as much for regional and global geostrategic reasons as it is in our own national security interests for the Mediterranean to be considered as a meeting place, rather than as a dividing line between peoples and cultures.

Of particular importance to us is the Euro-Mediterranean partnership launched in 1995 by the European Union in Barcelona. This partnership provides strong support for our belief that membership in the Union will reinforce Malta's traditional role in the promotion of Mediterranean security and cooperation. One of Malta's contributions to the Union will be the added insight into, and the commitment to, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation that Malta will bring with it. At the regional level, as much as at the broader international level, Malta sees its membership in the European Union as an element of further involvement in the process of multilateral cooperation for peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean.

Malta has welcomed, and is wholeheartedly involved in, the Barcelona partnership because of its intrinsic merits in promoting a concrete and effective programme of cooperation in the Mediterranean. In this regard, at their last meeting in Stuttgart, the foreign ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership agreed to reinforce comprehensive stability in the region through the conclusion of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Peace and Stability — an initiative in which Malta has been active from the outset and which it is keen to see take shape.

Despite the many challenges faced by the Mediterranean, it is our firm view that lasting solutions may be found. We sincerely believe that an early settlement of the Cyprus question along the lines of the relevant Security Council resolutions can be achieved.

Malta has been encouraged by the positive overtures signalled by the major protagonists in the Middle East peace process in recent months. What appeared to be for so long an intractable problem has been slowly but steadily unfolding towards the path of reconciliation and peace. True cooperation within the region demands that the spirit of reconciliation prevail. Recent events — most especially the Wye II Agreement — carried forward by all those working for peace in the region bode well for continued dialogue and cooperation between the parties of the region.

It is in this light that we hail the progress achieved on the question of Lockerbie and the resulting suspension of sanctions on Libya. The satisfaction expressed recently by both the Security Council and the European Union General Affairs Council in respect of positive developments in Libya also augurs well for the inclusion of Libya in the Euro-Mediterranean process as soon as it adopts the Barcelona *acquis*. We welcome this development.

May all these efforts lead to widespread cooperation for the Mediterranean as a whole, bringing peace and prosperity for its people in the years to come.

To many the new millennium is a time of promise and expectation, a period of change and transition. Yet, to many others — indeed too many — it is a time of difficulty and trepidation, of unfulfilled promises. Poised as we are on the brink of a new era, it is vital that the United Nations prevails to safeguard the well-being and prosperity of future generations.

Even our best efforts can be brought to nothing in an instant, by the sheer force of nature. The recent devastating earthquakes that hit the peoples of Turkey, Greece and Taiwan have galvanized the international community. Shocked by the loss of so many lives, the displacement of whole communities and the pain of thousands, the international response to alleviate the suffering was generous and expeditious. It was yet another instance where the expression of solidarity towards the victims of a natural disaster unveiled the human face of the international community.

That same spirit also inspires us when challenged by man-made disasters. It was that same spirit that gave birth to the United Nations.

We acknowledge that the United Nations cannot be the perfect panacea for the ills of the world. Yet it remains the unique platform from which to promote and protect the inherent rights of all peoples to live in peace, freedom and dignity. By focusing on human security in its manifold dimensions — political, economic and social — the United Nations will continue to be a beacon of hope to all nations.

The General Assembly has always shown that it is fully conscious of the need to invest in the future — an investment that also requires the consolidation of a culture of peace. This was the essence of the resolutions that proclaimed the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the next decade as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

It is our fervent hope that the Millennium Assembly next year will generate the necessary political will and

solidarity to ensure that our efforts on the international scene bear fruit to safeguard the values on which this Organization was founded. We must move the process of introspection and deliberation forward to a process of committed implementation and action. Strong political will and conviction are needed to fulfil our common goals.

We should not aim for short-term remedies, but should rather pool our collective efforts in order to achieve long-lasting solutions to the challenges we face today — the eve of a new era.

This is Malta's pledge for the new millennium. This is what we aim to ensure — that our efforts, both at the national and international level will be achieved.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.